

# **ENSURING WORLD CLASS READERS**

Policy and Research Forum on Third Grade Literacy



**Thursday, December 15, 2011**  
**Des Moines, Iowa**

# SUMMARY

## LITERACY GOALS IN THE GOVERNOR'S BLUEPRINT FOR EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE

The goal of “Ensuring World Class Readers” is to provide a strong evidence base for Iowa to achieve the goal of third grade literacy, drawing upon the framework established in the Governor’s blueprint, *One Unshakeable Vision: World Class Schools for Iowa*. Solutions require active commitment, leadership, insight, and involvement of many different Iowa constituencies – and third grade literacy is a particular area where consensus for action can be developed.

Governor Branstad was elected to his fifth term as Iowa Governor in November 2010 and has set education reform as one of his top priorities. Citing the stagnation in NAEP scores on reading in Iowa in particular, coupled with the ever-growing need for greater overall skill attainment and proficiency among students, Governor Branstad convened an Educational Summit in July 2011 that featured U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, former Governor of North Carolina Jim Hunt, and such educational scholars as Linda Darling-Diamond and Vivien Stewart, among others. Following that Summit and meetings with educational and business leaders across Iowa, Governor Branstad and Lieutenant Governor Reynolds unveiled a blueprint for educational excellence in Iowa – *One Unshakeable Vision: World Class Schools for Iowa*.

At the heart of the Blueprint is a commitment to excellence in teaching and leadership reflected through the following recommendations:

- » Attract and support high-quality teachers.
- » Develop education leaders within schools and a peer-based evaluation system.
- » Improve teacher incentives.
- » Establish a definition of educator effectiveness.
- » Maximize school principal time.
- » Improve and expand the Iowa Core.
- » Develop an assessment framework, including a kindergarten assessment, and have all Iowa 11th graders take a state-funded college-entrance exam.
- » Provide value-added measures for all districts, schools, grades and educators.
- » Seek a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind law and design a new accountability system.
- » **Ensure children learn basic literacy by the end of third grade**
- » Nurture innovation.
- » Create a state clearinghouse of high-quality online courses.
- » Set goals for student outcomes, including a 95 percent high school graduation rate and top statewide performance on national standardized assessments.

**The Governor's call for ensuring children learn basic literacy skills by the end of third grade represents a key goal for children's education and development that is receiving increasing recognition nationally as a fundamental component to educational reform.**

The Blueprint contains the following recommendations under the goal to "ensure third-grade literacy":

- » Require all districts to adopt a district-wide and research-based reading program for early childhood learning and elementary grades, with the goal of making sure children learn basic literacy early on.
- » Establish an "Iowa Center for Literacy Education" to act as a clearinghouse for best practices and research-based information. The center will provide guidance on strategies, curriculum, lessons, and individual student approaches to improve reading. This would link directly with the state's ongoing efforts around "Response to Intervention," which asks schools to have research-based instruction for all students and then make intensive adjustments for children who aren't learning from the general approach.
- » Have all third-grade students taking the statewide reading assessment do so in March. Results must be made available to schools no later than April. Students with good reason may take alternative district-selected assessments (including portfolio based assessments) instead of the state assessment, so long as those are approved by the Iowa Center for Literacy Education.
- » End social promotion for third-graders who read poorly, with numerous good cause exemptions (disability, English Language Learning, for example) and multiple opportunities to pass. Being able to read after third grade is a critical juncture where children transition from "learning to read" to "reading to learn." Moving children along who are not ready to do that puts them at a huge disadvantage for the rest of their lives.
- » Provide all third-graders who are retained the opportunity to attend a summer reading camp staffed by high quality teachers. Students would have the opportunity to demonstrate literacy and move into the fourth grade at the end of the summer.
- » Allow schools to promote retained students to fourth grade whenever they can read.

In addition, the Governor's Blueprint calls for greater parental and community involvement by recommending the creation of a "statewide parent and community engagement network":

- » Establish a statewide effort to increase parent and community engagement in every school in Iowa.
- » Create paid teacher leader roles in high-needs schools, where these "parent liaisons" work to establish connections with families to get them more involved in their child's education.
- » Target parent and community involvement resources toward high-poverty neighborhoods.

*Ensuring World Class Readers* is designed to bring the best thinking and research – both nationally and in Iowa – to the discussion on how to achieve this key goal of ensuring third grade literacy.

# SPEAKERS

## **RALPH R. SMITH**

Vice-President, Annie E. Casey Foundation  
Chair, Campaign for Grade Level Reading



Ralph R. Smith directs the Campaign for Grade Level Reading, a coalition of more than 80 funders, sector-leading nonprofits, and corporate organizations from across the country dedicated to improving 3rd grade reading proficiency in the United States during the next decade.

Smith has served since 1994 on the senior leadership team of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, a private philanthropy established by Jim Casey, the founder of United Parcel Services, dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. A nationally recognized legal scholar, Smith previously served for two decades as a member of the Law Faculty at the University of Pennsylvania.

As Chief of Staff and Chief Operating Officer for the Philadelphia School District, Smith led the effort to develop and implement the district's Voluntary Desegregation Plan. He also headed the school district's negotiation team that led to some of the nation's first education reform-driven teacher contracts.

As a senior advisor to former Mayor Wilson Goode, Smith also helped resolve the labor-management impasse around the Superintendent's Children Achieving Plan, turning it into a district-wide blueprint for reform supported by the Annenberg Challenge.

Smith is a founding director of both the National Center on Fathers and Families and the Philadelphia Children's Network.

In 2010 Smith received the Jane Addams Distinguished Leadership Award from the United Neighborhood Centers of America for his lifelong work to improve quality of life for low-income individuals and families through more effective social policy and practice. He is the 2011 recipient of the Fred Rogers Leadership in Philanthropy Award from Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families.

## **NELL K. DUKE, ED.D.**

Professor of Teacher Education and Educational Psychology and Co-Director of the Literacy Achievement Research Center, Michigan State University



Nell K. Duke, Ed.D., received her Bachelor's degree from Swarthmore College and her Masters and Doctoral degrees from Harvard University. Dr. Duke's work focuses on early literacy development, particularly among children living in poverty. Her specific areas of expertise include development of informational reading and writing in young children, comprehension development and instruction in early schooling, and issues of equity in literacy education. Dr. Duke is the recipient of the American Educational Research Association Early Career Award, the National Reading Conference Early Career Achievement Award, the International Reading Association Dina Feitelson Research Award, the National Council of Teachers of English Promising Researcher Award, and the International Reading Association Outstanding Dissertation Award.

Dr. Duke is author and co-author of numerous journal articles and book chapters as well as the books *Reading and Writing Informational Text in the Primary Grades: Research-Based Practices*; *Literacy and the Youngest Learner: Best Practices for Educators of Children from Birth to Five*; *Beyond Bedtime Stories: A Parent's Guide to Promoting Reading, Writing, and Other Literacy Skills From Birth to 5*; and her most recent book, *Reading and Writing Genre with Purpose in K–8 Classrooms*. She is also editor of The Research-Informed Classroom book series and co-editor of the book *Literacy Research Methodologies*.

Dr. Duke teaches preservice, inservice and doctoral courses in literacy education at Michigan State, speaks and consults widely on literacy education, and is an active member of several literacy-related organizations. She has served as author and consultant on a number of educational programs, including *Buzz About IT*, *iOpeners*, *National Geographic Science K-2* and the *DLM Express*. Duke also has a strong interest in improving the quality of educational research training in the U.S.

## HEATHER WEISS, ED.D.

Founder and Director, Harvard Family Research Project

Senior Research Associate and Lecturer, Harvard Graduate School of Education



From its beginning in 1983, Harvard Family Research Project's (HFRP's) mission has been to support the creation of more effective practices, interventions and policies to promote children's successful development from birth to adulthood. A key emphasis of HFRP's work is the promotion, documentation and assessment of *complementary learning*—strategies that support children's learning and development in nonschool as well as school contexts.

Dr. Weiss and her colleagues are well known for their work building the demand for and use of evaluation as a cornerstone of social change, to which end HFRP also provides strategic planning and evaluation services for foundations and communities. Their current evaluation portfolio includes evaluations of national foundation efforts to scale up universal prekindergarten services and extended learning opportunities.

Dr. Weiss writes, speaks and advises on programs and policies for children and families and serves on the advisory boards of many public and private organizations. Her recent publications focus on reframing research and evaluation to support continuous improvement and democratic decision making, examining the case for complementary learning from a research and policy perspective, and assessing new ways of providing and evaluating professional development. She is a consultant and advisor to numerous foundations on strategic grantmaking and evaluation. She received her doctorate in Education and Social Policy from the Harvard Graduate School of Education and she was a postdoctoral research fellow at the Yale Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy.



# AGENDA

**9:30 a.m.**

## **Welcome**

Charles Bruner – Child and Family Policy Center  
Elisabeth Buck – United Way of Central Iowa  
Michelle Rich – Iowa Afterschool Alliance

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**9:45 a.m.**

## **Welcome to Des Moines**

Mayor Frank Cownie – City of Des Moines (invited)

## **Morning Keynote**

Ralph R. Smith - Vice President, Annie E. Casey Foundation  
“The Reading Imperative and Iowa Leadership”

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**10:30 a.m.**

## **Responder Panel**

“Securing a Vision and Focus for Iowa on Third Grade Literacy”

- » Teree Caldwell-Johnson – Des Moines School Board
- » Linda Fandel, Office of Governor Branstad
- » Doug Gross, Attorney at Law, Brown Winick
- » Tom Urban, Former President and CEO, Pioneer HiBred International

The Governor’s Blueprint has proposed a number of actions to ensure third grade literacy for Iowa students. Community-led efforts, including efforts under national foundation leadership, are currently underway to achieve the same goal. This panel will build upon the keynote address provided by Ralph Smith and discuss how Iowa can take advantage of state, community, and national efforts to improve third grade literacy in the state and make Iowa a leader in the country and across the world.

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**11:30 a.m.**

## **Lunch**

**12:00 p.m.**

## **Keynote Session**

“Putting Evidence into Practice – Classroom and Parent-Community Components for World Class Third Grade Literacy Results”

- » Dr. Nell K. Duke, Michigan State University
  - » Dr. Heather Weiss, Harvard Family Research Project, Cambridge, MA
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**"Starting Prepared: Ensuring Effective Linkages Between 0-5 and 5-8"**

- » Lou Ann Gvist, Iowa Association of School Boards
- » Tom Rendon, Iowa Head Start State Collaboration Office
- » Ralph R. Smith, Annie E. Casey Foundation
- » Representative Cindy Winckler, Iowa General Assembly

While the major focus of the Blueprint is upon what happens in K-3, success in K-3 also depends upon children entering school prepared. The Blueprint calls for a comprehensive kindergarten assessment that also can be used as a basis for developing early learning strategies. This session will examine how to develop a seamless system that supports children's learning from age 0 to 5 and into school age.

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**"Building Effective Out-of-School Programs: Evidenced-Based School-Parent-Community Strategies"**

- » Alison Bell, Area Education Agency 267 and Iowa Parent Information Resource Centers
- » Candace Borrall, Beyond the Bell, Sioux City
- » Cecil Brewton, George Washington Carver Community School, Des Moines Public Schools
- » Cyndy Erickson, Iowa Department of Education and Safe and Supportive Schools Grant
- » Representative Kevin Koester, Iowa General Assembly
- » Dr. Heather Weiss, Harvard Family Research Project

Research shows that effective community, school, and parent partnerships improve educational, social, and behavioral outcomes for children and youth. This session will identify strategies for ensuring education reform is a community-wide effort, recognizing that schools can't and shouldn't take on reform alone. Schools must partner with community-based and faith-based organizations, business, and parents to ensure our youth are reading at grade level in third grade.

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**"Beyond Social Advancement: What to Do When Children Aren't Reading By the End of Third Grade"**

- » Linda Fandel, Office of Governor Branstad
- » Representative Greg Forristall, Iowa General Assembly
- » Senator Matt McCoy, Iowa General Assembly
- » Mike Owen, West Branch Board of Education

Research is clear that children with low literacy skills at the end of third grade face significant challenges to learning in subsequent grades. This session will explore to what extent establishing an advancement policy based on reading proficiency can increase student achievement and what strategies are most promising to ensure non-proficient students improve their reading.

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**2:30**

**Next Steps Panel**

- » Marsha Aldridge, Business/Education Alliance of Greater Des Moines
- » Jason Glass, Iowa Department of Education
- » Lou Ann Gvist, Iowa Association of School Boards
- » Brad Hudson, Iowa State Education Association
- » Representative Mark Lofgren, Iowa General Assembly
- » Laura Sands, Office of Senator Tom Harkin
- » Representative Sharon Steckman, Iowa General Assembly

Third grade literacy is only one element of the Governor’s Blueprint but certainly one that will require legislative action and the commitment of the education, business, and advocacy community to achieve. This panel, drawing upon the day’s discussions, will offer insights on how policymakers can draw upon the best research and evidence to achieve the goal that all children are reading by the end of third grade.

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**3:30 p.m.**

**Last Words: Dr. Nell K. Duke, Ralph R. Smith, and Dr. Heather Weiss**

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**4:00 p.m.**

**Adjourn**

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## **SPECIAL EVENT**

### **8:30 a.m. Preconference Roundtable Discussion with Dr. Nell Duke: K-3 Classroom Strategies to Ensure Third Grade Literacy**

Throughout *One Unshakeable Vision*, Governor Branstad’s blueprint for educational transformation, skilled and passionate teachers are seen as fundamental to student and school success. At the same time, these teachers need support, resources, tools, and knowledge to fulfill the expectations placed upon them. Focusing specifically on third grade literacy, the Blueprint also has two additional recommendations:

- » Require all districts to adopt a district-wide and research-based reading program for early childhood learning and elementary grades, with the goal of making sure children learn basic literacy early on.
- » Establish an “Iowa Center for Literacy Education” to act as a clearinghouse for best practices and research-based information to provide guidance on strategies curriculum, lessons, and individual student approaches to improve reading and link directly with efforts to make intensive adjustments for children who aren’t learning from the general approach.

This roundtable discussion, led by Dr. Nell Duke and including Iowa leaders in education and research, will work to set out key principles and strategies to moving these (or other proposals for classroom strategies to improve literacy) from an outline into a plan and set of policies.

Des Moines Botanical Center  
909 Robert D. Ray Drive  
Des Moines, Iowa

### Forum Sponsors



Child and Family Policy Center – Des Moines, Iowa – [www.cfpciowa.org](http://www.cfpciowa.org)

Iowa Afterschool Alliance – [www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org](http://www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org)

United Way of Central Iowa – [www.unitedwaydm.org](http://www.unitedwaydm.org)

Business/Education Alliance of Greater Des Moines

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